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A CIA Pretense

At a press briefing in St. Louis Director William E. Colby of the Central Intelligence Agency indicated that by such appearances he is trying to repair the damage to his agency done by adverse publicity stemming from congressional investigations. If success depended only on a cool and urbane manner, Mr. Colby accomplished his purpose here.

But the press has an obligation to look behind the friendly smile and the smooth answer. At one point Mr. Colby was asked to comment on testimony before the House intelligence committee by Samuel A. Adams, former principal CIA analyst of Viet Cong troop strength, to the effect that the agency, yielding to military and political pressure, had underrated the adversary's strength just before the 1968 Tet offensive. Mr. Colby replied that there had simply been a disagreement between Mr. Adams and others in the agency over categories of Viet Cong forces and that there was no deception or changing of figures.

This answer just does not square with the evidence provided by Mr. Adams, both in his House testimony and in a detailed article in

the May issue of *Harper's* magazine. He reported that in 1966 he had found that the Pentagon was using an estimate of Viet Cong guerrilla strength (103,573) that had been thought up by the South Vietnamese and that had remained unchanged for two years. After studying reports from the field, Mr. Adams estimated as early as 1966 that *total* Viet Cong troop strength was 600,000 rather than the 270,000 figure used by the American command.

Yet despite strenuous protests by Mr. Adams, the only CIA analyst on this assignment, the agency, under orders from Director Richard Helms, accepted the American command's figure of 270,000 as late as 1968.

The deceptive figure, put out in response to pressure from Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and Gen. Creighton Abrams, was only changed after the disastrous Tet offensive, which cost heavy U.S. casualties, made clear that the military estimates had been wrong.

By pretending that the only issue here was a difference of opinion between Mr. Adams and his colleagues, Mr. Colby is not helping the CIA's image.

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